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ABSTRACT

The first step in a multi-stage approach to assessment of the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Art at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, this study assessed the department's introductory course. Data came from cognitive pre/post tests, self reports, and peer evaluations. Results indicated that: (1) students scored higher on the post-test than the pre-test; (2) the self-report showed learning improvement in discipline breadth, finding and reading of communication research, understanding journal article formats, writing abstracts and literature reviews, and in knowledge of APA (American Psychological Association) style; (3) sophomores report the most "learning", reflecting the design of the course, which is aimed at them; (4) student papers do not always reflect a specific communications focus; (5) students have more difficulty after connecting research questions to hypotheses in their paper proposals; (6) students need to employ better definition of terms and rational for their choices; (7) students need to read their documents more carefully; and (8) students need to consider research ethics more in making their choices of method. Additional research should decide the purpose of the assessment and report findings to the Dean of Curriculum and Assessment, and should include assessment of oral performance and upper-level theory-based courses. Contains sample course objectives, pre-test, course assessment form, and paper review form. (EF)

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Assessing the Course: The Department Perspective

Donald E. Rice

Paper presented at the 1999 convention
of the National Communication Association

Others contributed to the ideas and materials for this paper, including: Hank Tkachuk, Fred Sternhagen, Linda Dickmeyer, Kris Pond-Burtis, and members of the SCTA Dept. at Concordia College.

CS 510 225

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Assessing the Course: The Department Perspective

The Department:

The Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Art is a liberal arts department at a private liberal arts college of the Lutheran church: Concordia, Moorhead. For a small college, we are a large department with the second largest number of majors and minors on campus. We have app. 12 full-time faculty, and several part-time faculty. Media, theatre, speech, and communication instruction are under the umbrella of "SCTA". We have several different majors, and several concentrations of majors under the "communication" side, including concentrations in media, organizational communication, and public relations/advertising.

The Course:

COM 201: Introduction to Communication Studies is a requirement for Communication majors and minors, and a prerequisite for many of the "non-skills" courses in the curriculum. Theatre majors are not required to take the course, but now that the college has allowed double majoring between theatre and communication, a good number of theatre students do take the course. Additionally, the course fulfills a requirement in the liberal arts core of Area B: social sciences. Most of the students taking the course intend to major or minor in communication. The course is unique because it covers communication inquiry and research methods as well as a field survey. Go to the faculty webpages for Don Rice and Hank Tkachuk at www.cord.edu for more information.

The Plan:

The overall assessment plan for the department arose out of a self-study resulting in a multi-stage approach to assessment. The department decided that assessing 201 was the first step because of its importance in our curriculum. So in 1997, the stage one committee was assigned consisting of the three faculty members currently involved in teaching the course. We began by defining objectives (attached), and by doing some exploratory research with communication students, which had them identifying what they saw as key terms and concepts in communication. After evaluating that information, and attending a workshop on assessment, we decided on the following methods for assessment:

-a cognitive pre-test/post-test, administered in 1998
-a self-report instrument also used in 1998
-a peer evaluation review process for course papers written in 1998, analyzed in 1999.
(forms attached for each of the above)

The Results:

The process of analyzing the data we gathered is on-going, and is currently being evaluated by the department. Specific data can be made available on request, but we have made the following observations so far:

--students scored significantly higher on the post-test than on the pre-test

--the self-report instrument showed significant improvements in student learning in the following areas: breadth of the discipline, finding and reading comm. research, understanding journal article formats, writing abstracts and lit. reviews, and knowledge of APA style.

--additionally, students reported having learned "a great deal" in the course, and indicated a strong willingness to take additional coursework in the department.

--there was less evidence that they now understand what a "research community" is, or that they were significantly challenged by the course, though male students indicated feeling more challenged than did female students. Males also reported more "perceived learning" than female students.

--sophomores report the most "learning," out of sophomores, junior, and seniors. This reflects the design of the course, which is aimed at the 200-level or sophomore student. No first-year student take the course.

(Peer Review of Papers):

--students don't always reflect a specific communication focus in their papers and the degree to which teachers emphasize this may vary.

--students have difficulty connecting research questions to hypotheses in their research proposal papers.

--students need to define terms better and provide more rationale for choices in the research proposals.

--students need to read their base documents more carefully.

--students need to think about research ethics more in making their choices of method.

We also observed that reviewers may evaluate papers differently than teachers, based, in part, on their knowledge of the individual's progress through the project. We also discovered that we needed to provide more specific criteria for items on the peer rating sheet, and to further identify what rating levels mean in terms of student achievement.

The Next Steps:

Once the department has approved the report, we need to decide what information to pass on to the Dean's office. A preliminary report has gone to the Dean of Curriculum and Assessment, and he has been apprised of our method, but results have not yet been sent. Of course, decisions may need to be made about what information is in-house information and what information is "public." Part of this hinges on our ongoing debate over the purpose(s) of assessment: Is the primary benefit geared to the improvement of teaching? Or is the information collected primarily for summative and evaluative reasons, potentially used for resource allocation and other administrative functions?

Finally, this information should be employed by current and future teachers of the course, as well as forming the basis for the next two stages: the assessment of our oral performance courses, and the assessment of upper-level theory-based courses. How will stage one lead to an overall understanding of general outcomes for our students?

Course Objectives:

--Students will know how to locate and use the literature of the discipline.
--Students will understand the basic processes of communication inquiry and research and begin to demonstrate the ability to think like social scientists.
--Students will begin to develop an appropriate theoretical vocabulary for use when discussing and writing about communication.
--Students will be able to analyze the literature of the discipline in written abstracts, reviews of literature, and research proposals.
--Students will be able to discuss and generate research questions, hypotheses, and potential research methods for topics in the discipline.
--Students will develop critical thinking skills that allow them an entry point to the dialogue of the field of communication.
--Students will begin to understand the breadth and depth of the communication discipline and its many contexts.

SCTA 201 Pre-test for assessment purposes
Confidential - not to be distributed

Mark your choice on the answer sheet. Only one answer per question. On multiple-choice items, choose the BEST answer

1. To say that communication is a symbolic process means that it relies on language, which has a natural, non-arbitrary relationship to the things it represents.

2. Humming a tune is an example of non-verbal, non-vocal communication.

3. Models have moved from a linear approach to a transactional or dynamic approach to communication.

4. A system can be defined as a *bundle of relations*.

5. A hypothesis is a tentative statement of truth.

6. What statement below best captures the principle idea of the-Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativity theory?
   a) Members of a culture all think precisely alike.
   b) Thinking is independent of language.
   c) Categories present in language shape the language user's perceptions of reality.
   d) Language cause behavior.

7. The pre-occupation with communication as a transmission or transference of messages has been called the:
   a) Berlo model.
   b) content metaphor.
   c) conduit metaphor.
   d) communication gap.

8. Color, sound, and lighting all are part of what form of nonverbal communication?
   a) environment
   b) kinesics
   c) paralanguage
   d) touch

9. Although scholars disagree about the role of intentionality in defining human communication, all would agree that communication occurs under one of the conditions below. Which one?
   a) one person intending to send a message and another person not recognizing that intent
   b) one person intending to send a message and another person recognizing that intent
   c) one person not intending to send a message and another person thinking that s/he did intend to
   d) one person not intending to send a message and another person not thinking s/he did intend to

10. It is unusual for a group to experience tension at the beginning of their work together; when this happens, it signals a group whose later work together probably will be ineffective.

11. The *magic bullet* theory suggests that people are directly influenced by mediated messages.

12. The editor of a newspaper is an example of a *gatekeeper* in media theory.

13. A person who acts from an *egalitarian* theory of ethics would argue that the ends always justify the means.

14. Primary tension can occur at any point during a group's duration.

15. What do gatekeepers do?
    a) conduct research regarding media use
    b) explain effects of media usage
    c) monitor and control the flow of communication
    d) advise people to avoid use of the mass media

16. According to the two-step flow theory, a person's reaction to a television show is the result of what?
    a) the show's content
    b) the individual viewer's perception
    c) interpersonal relationships
    d) all of the above

17. Haiman argues that speech is the preferred remedy for most problems, that people are generally responsible for their own behavior and are the best judges of their own interests, and that the government has a tremendous responsibility to protect people's freedom of speech. What ethical perspective does this represent?
    a) deontological
    b) teleological
    c) dialogic
    d) marketplace of ideas

18. Social exchange theory suggests that the costs in an interpersonal relationship must outweigh the rewards if the relationship is to continue.

19. High fear appeals are more likely to cause attitude change than moderate fear appeals.

20. According to Bormann's symbolic convergence theory, a family that shares a rhetorical vision such as "We Clinton's are achievers" shares a common:
    a) LPC score
    b) role negotiation
    c) interact
    d) fantasy theme

21. When two people ask questions of each other and self-disclose equally, we call this:
    a) a double interact phase
    b) reciprocity
    c) peer influence
    d) a neurotic interpersonal relationship

22. The part of the Toulmin model of argument which expresses what the speaker hopes to prove is called the:
    a) claim
    b) data
    c) warrant
    d) evidence

23. According to the Cognitive dissonance theory, statement which are marked by inconsistency characterize the state of:
    a) consonance
    b) dissonance
    c) assimilation
    d) ego-involvement

24. The degree to which individuals vary in weight is an example of a continuous variable.

25. A research design can have achieved reliability even if it has not achieved validity.

26. Value differences are rarely a source of ambiguity or difficulty in intercultural communication

27. According to the APA, all words in the title of a journal article should be underlined.

28. A parsimonious theory is one with as many propositions as possible

29. According to the APA, a writer must document a source whenever he/she:
    a) refers to someone else's work
    b) paraphrases or summarizes someone else's work
    c) uses facts and data that are common knowledge
    d) none of the above

30. The function of theory that stimulates and guides future research is called:
    a) extension
    b) intension
    c) heuristic
    d) none of the above

SCTA 201 COURSE ASSESSMENT

This form is being used to assess specific characteristics of your reaction to SCTA 201. It is part of an ongoing assessment process and is being administered in addition to the regular student evaluation forms.

Please use the following scale to respond to the statements below, writing the **number** that represents your response:

5=strongly agree 4=agree 3=neutral 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree

Learning

___1. This course has introduced me to many communication-related topics, giving me a picture of the breadth of the communication discipline.

___2. I know more now than I did four months ago about how to find and read communication research.

___3. I understand the definition of communication better than I did.

___4. I understand the basic format of a journal article which reports original research.

___5. I understand what a research community is.

___6. I understand the purpose of models of communication and would recognize the most important ones.

___7. 201 has helped me understand the formulation of research questions and hypotheses.

___8. 201 has increased my understanding of the distinction between self-report data, observational data, and physiological data.

___9. I understand how to abstract information from a research article.

___10. I understand how to review and compare several research articles on a topic.

___11. I understand the difference between independent and dependent variables.

___12. I have learned the basics of how to use APA style when writing a paper.

___13. I already knew how to use APA style before taking this class.

___14. I have found SCTA 201 to be a course that challenged me academically.

___15. I see connections between this class and other courses I have taken.

___16. I feel a sense of personal satisfaction or pride in the extent of my learning in this class.

17. Please check the space that represents your overall assessment of your learning in this course:

I have learned very little ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ **I have learned a great deal**

Demographic information (circle all that apply)

18. Sex: male female 19. Year in school: frosh soph junior senior

19. I took the course because: major/minor Dist. B core **(not a major/minor)**

20. My interest in doing additional coursework in SCTA is: high medium low

SCTA 201 Paper Review Form

Date-

Reviewer **Instructor**

Student Identification **Section**

Research Proposal Assignment

	Above expectations	Meets expectations	Doesn't meet expectations
Clearly states research question	3	2	1
Clearly states hypothesis	3	2	1
Describes method	3	2	1
Appropriate choice of method	3	2	1
Forecasts results	3	2	1
Discusses potential issues (measurement, sample size, etc.)	3	2	1
Overall assessment of writing	3	2	1
Uses APA form correctly	3	2	1

Other comments:

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